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Air India privatisation will level the playing field in India: IATA Chief

By Mihir Mishra, ET Bureau Last Updated: Mar 20, 2021, 12:08 PM IST

Synopsis

The government is in the process of selling 100% of Air India's international subsidiary Air India Express, as well as 50% in the ground-handling unit AISATS.



Alexandre de Juniac, Director General and CEO of IATA

Air India's privatisation will level the playing field in the much-needed reform of the aviation sector and will equalise the competitive landscape in the country.

International Air Transport Association (IATA) told ET.

"It will improve the competitive condition in India because no one will

be able to claim that they have special support from the government... I have heard many operators complain about the support received by the flag carrier," **Alexandre de Juniac**, Director General and CEO of IATA, said in an interview. "It (divestment of AI) will equalise the competitive landscape in the country."

The government is in the process of selling 100% of **Air India** and its low-cost international subsidiary **Air India Express**, as well as 50% in the ground-handling unit AISATS. It has received initial inquiries from multiple parties after a failed divestment attempt in 2018 and several extensions in 2020.

While many in the industry say that this may not be the right time to divest stake, the government has maintained that the interest shown by prospective buyers is encouraging and New Delhi is likely to ask for financial bids by

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In the past, several airlines have complained about special privileges being given to Air India in the form of funding its losses through equity infusion by the government and priority being given to Air India on foreign flights and slots. De Juniatic, who has been at the helm at possibly the worst time for the aviation sector, also said that the pandemic has taught the industry to be more prepared by creating dedicated testing facilities at airports and will pave way for digitisation in aviation. Limited international flights through bubble agreements could have helped the sector in India. "India responded by creating bilateral bubbles... that could have been helpful for the sector. However, we are advocating in favour of government financial support for airlines and we regret that the Indian government did not give money to the sector," he said.

(Originally published on Mar 19, 2021)

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